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A SEAT IN THE PARK

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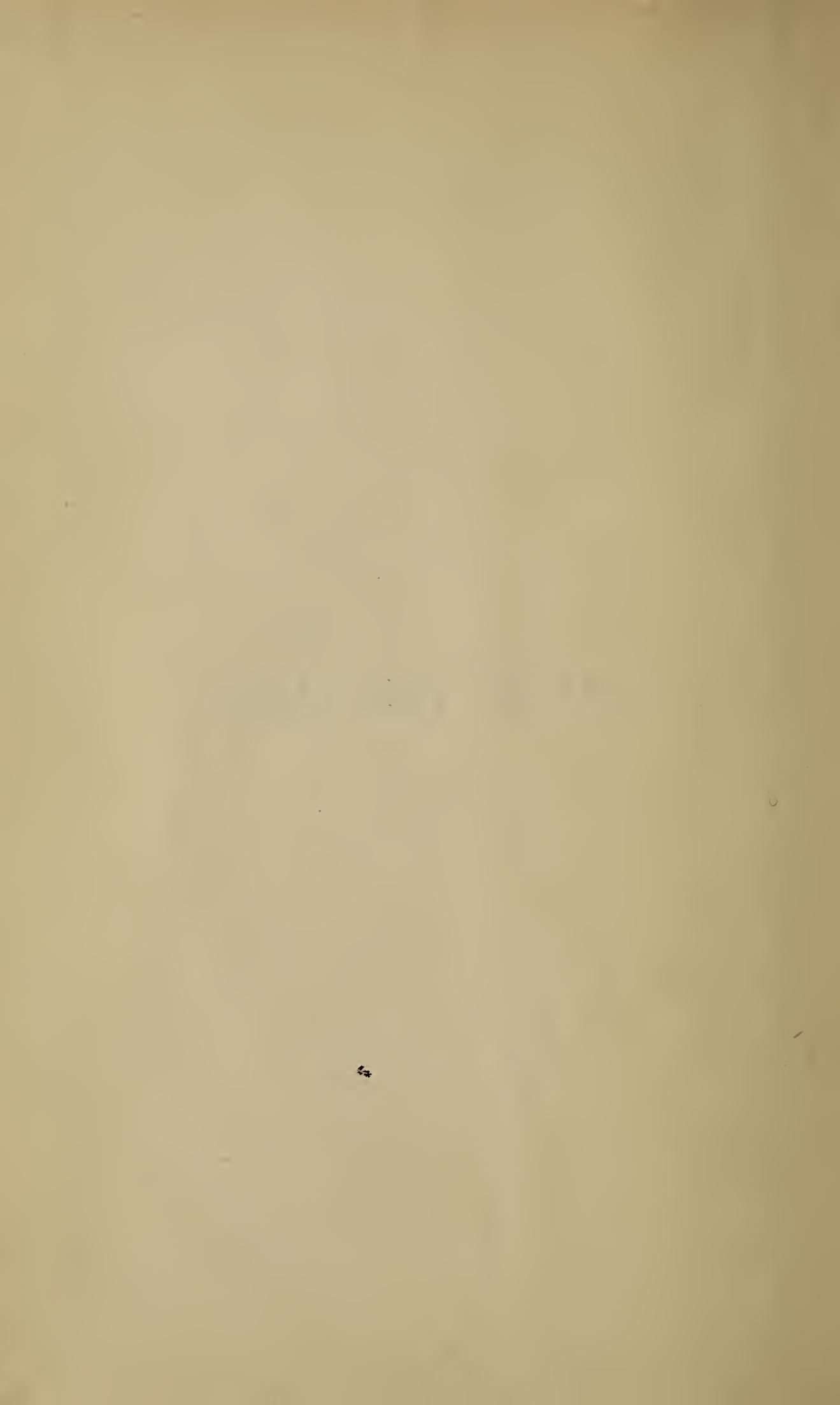
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ANNEX

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A SEAT IN THE PARK



A SEAT IN THE PARK

A Warning

BY
ARTHUR PINERO

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LONDON
SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.
PUBLISHERS
26 SOUTHAMPTON STREET
STRAND, W.C.2

NEW YORK
SAMUEL FRENCH
PUBLISHER
25 WEST 45TH STREET

598593

Produced at the Winter Garden Theatre, London,
on February 21st, 1922, with the following cast
of Characters:—

A MR. POSTLETHWAITE . *Mr. Dion Boucicault*
A MISS BEECHCROFT ¹ . *Miss Irene Vanbrugh*
A CHAIR MAN . . . *Mr. R. Lichfield Owen*

PLACE.—*Hyde Park.* TIME.—*A Summer evening.*

¹ *This young lady also appears in the author's little piece
called "Playgoers."*

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SAMUEL FRENCH
25 WEST 45th STREET
NEW YORK CITY

A SEAT IN THE PARK

The SCENE is a lawn in Hyde Park on a fine summer evening. Realism should not be attempted. All that is necessary is an ordinary woodland "cloth" and a couple of chairs such as are hired out in public gardens. Even a background of plain green drapery will suffice when a painted cloth is unobtainable. Imagination, aided by the statement in the playbill that the place is Hyde Park, will do the rest.

Almost in the centre of the stage MISS BEEHCROFT is seated on one of the chairs. She is a good-looking young woman in cheap clothes. Cheap as they are, however, there is nothing about them to detract from her comeliness. In fact, MISS BEEHCROFT possesses decided allurements for anybody of the opposite sex who is weak enough to be susceptible to female charms. She is reading a popular magazine, and, as one leg is crossed over the other, unconsciously displays a great deal of semi-transparent imitation-silk stocking. A short distance away, on the right—"right" and "left" being the spectators' right and left, not the actor's—is the second chair, unoccupied.

Presently MR. POSTLETHWAITE enters from the right and strolls by. He is middle-aged—young people would say elderly—and is dressed in a style that may be described as "natty." He wears a white hat with a narrow black band, a gay waistcoat, boots with light-coloured tops, and is carrying a gold-knobbed cane. But—so contrary are the elements in human character—notwithstanding his spruceness he has a melancholy countenance and is evidently suffering from profound depression. As he

slowly passes MISS BEEHCROFT his eyes fall upon her neat head and trim figure, and before he disappears on the left he so far violates the canons of good breeding as to cast a glance at her over his shoulder.

Beyond the turning of a leaf of her magazine by MISS BEEHCROFT, nothing happens for a few moments, and then MR. POSTLETHWAITE saunters back. With his lips pursed as though he is humming to himself, he wanders behind MISS BEEHCROFT to the vacant chair, and there, having looked about him cautiously, he sits and makes a show of examining his well-fitting pearl-grey gloves. He is really observing MISS BEEHCROFT out of the corner of his eye, and after a time he plucks up courage to address her.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*coughing as a preliminary measure*). Ahem! (*Pleasantly.*) Beautiful evening.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*in an extremely genteel voice—with a slight, frigid turn of her head in MR. POSTLETHWAITE'S direction*). I beg pardon?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Fine evening.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*without enthusiasm*). Very.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Trees, too, are lookin' lovely.

MISS BEEHCROFT. Beg pardon?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*gesturing*). Trees are lookin' lovely.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*uncertain as to whether she shall continue to read or not*). Very.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. In my opinion, travel where you may, there's no spot in the world to equal dear ol' Hyde Park.

MISS BEEHCROFT. Dessay you're right. (*Finger-ing the leaves of her magazine.*) I haven't been what you'd call a great traveller, myself.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Never been abroad?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Oh, I won't say that. Twice to the Isle o' Man.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*rising—his hand on the back of his chair*). May I—er——?

MISS BEEHCROFT (*looking full at him and raising her eyebrows*). Beg pardon?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*dragging his chair towards her*). Easier to talk if I come a bit nearer.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*as he sits beside her—stiffening her body*). I'm not aware that I'm in the habit of talking to complete strangers.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Oh, my dear young lady, don't be cross.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Nice thing if you can't enjoy a read in the open without being accosted by gentlemen!

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. I'm not "accosting" you. A most uncalled-for expression. I'm not accosting you.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Seems like it, to my mind.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. I'm in the blues, dreadfully in the blues; and it came over me that a little chat—a little sympathetic companionship—if only for ten minutes, would do me good.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*regarding him scornfully*). You in the blues! Don't make me laugh. Why, you're dressed to kill.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*moodily*). Dress is no criterion. I *am* a dressy man; I admit it. Always have been. If I was hung for murder, I'd be led out in a noo suit o' clothes. But an aching heart, recollect, often beats under velvet and ermine. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Shakespeare, isn't it?

MISS BEECHCROFT (*with a shiver of propriety*). I'm shaw I don't know. (*Interested in spite of herself*.) You've friends, haven't you?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Friends! Scores of 'em. I suppose there's no man in London more popular in his own set than I am. And my set is the best set, mark you; the—best—set.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*curling her lip*). You do boast.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. I'm not boasting. A most uncalled-for remark. I am simply stating a fact. Some of 'em are sittin' within a stone's throw of us at this moment, shouldn't wonder. I'm takin' the risk of that.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Then why don't you pour out your sorrows, if you have any, to *them*?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*darkly*). Can't.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Can't?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. *They* think I'm happy; and I won't undeceive 'em. Oh, I'm a whited sepulchre, if ever there was one.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*shrinking*). A *what*?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. A livin' sham, a fraud, an impostor. (*Arresting a movement on her part.*) Don't be frightened. Sounds contradictory, but I assure you I'm as harmless as the cat on the hearthrug.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*eyeing him in fear*). Married?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*sitting bolt upright*). Married! (*Involuntarily clutching her knee and laughing mirthlessly.*) Ha, ha, ha!

MISS BEECHCROFT (*withdrawing her knee from his reach*). Look heah, if you don't behave yourself, I'll give you in charge!

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Sorry. Sorry. But you've hit it. My dear, that's what's the matter with me. You've hit it.

(*A seedy, pasty-faced man in an official cap, with a satchel slung over his shoulder, has entered at the back from the right and now bears down upon them and stands silently before POSTLETHWAITE.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*to the man*). Eh? Oh——

(*He produces some silver from his trousers-pocket as MISS BEECHCROFT opens a handbag which is in her lap and dives for her purse.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*to her*). No, no. Allow me—(*giving the man a coin*)—allow me——

MISS BEECHCROFT (*tossing her head*). Reahly——!

(*The man hands POSTLETHWAITE the change and then punches two tickets.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*to MISS BEECHCROFT*). Invariably happens in this Park; invariably happens! Directly you start a conversation—— (*to the man*) thank you.

(*He receives his tickets and slips them into a pocket of his waistcoat, and the man shambles away on the left.*)

MISS BEEHCROFT (*shutting her bag*). I'm not in the habit, please understand, of having my chair stood me by Tom, Dick or Harry.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*bowing gallantly*). A privilege; a privilege. (*Resuming the conversation.*) I was just telling you, wasn't I——?

MISS BEEHCROFT. That you're a married man.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*throwing up his hands*). Good lord, yes!

MISS BEEHCROFT. How long——?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Twenty years next month. Twenty years!

MISS BEEHCROFT. Sick to death of each other?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Not she of *me*. She loves me—adores me—worships the ground I walk on. There's where the tragedy comes in.

MISS BEEHCROFT. You're sick of *her*, you mean?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*cunningly*). Ah, but I don't show it; I wouldn't let her suspect it on any account.

MISS BEEHCROFT. That's why you can't confide in your friends? They might give you away.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Exactly. (*Holding up a finger.*) Mark you, I respect her. I respect her. She's an admirable woman. There isn't a more admirable woman breathin' than my missus. (*Rocking himself to and fro.*) Oh, but she's so out o' date! She's so horribly out o' date!

MISS BEEHCROFT. Old-fashioned?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Old-fashioned——!

MISS BEEHCROFT. Frumpy?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Frumpy——!

MISS BEEHCROFT (*nodding*). I know; I know 'em.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Last night, for instance, we were dinin' in Sussex Square. Rather a swell occasion. Guest of the evenin' was a peer. The missus had a noo gown on—as noo as the peer. Ha, ha! (*Dolefully.*) You see, I can't help makin' a joke, miserable as I am.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*with a sniff*). I hate jokes in the middle of a story.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Shows what a high-spirited chap I am naturally.

MISS BEEHCROFT. A joke's one thing and a story's another, I always maintain.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. At any rate, there we were, surrounded by some of the smartest people in town—smart in every sense of the word. The charmin' lady I took down honoured me by admirin' my pearl studs—genuine, not cultured—and the turquoise-and-diamond buttons in my white waistcoat——

MISS BEEHCROFT. Oh, don't be so conceited! You'll make me ill before you've done.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*hurt*). I'm not conceited. A most uncalled-for imputation. But when a gorgeous creature compliments you by noticin'——

(*The CHAIR MAN reappears, entering from the left, and again presents himself before POSTLETHWAITE and MISS BEEHCROFT.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*to the man*). Paid.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*to the man*). We have our tickets.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. We have them.

(*The man mechanically touches the peak of his cap with a soiled forefinger and slouches away on the right.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*tilting his hat to the back of his head and drawing his hand across his brow*). Carryin' on a conversation in this beastly Park is becomin' an impossibility; a sheer impossibility. (*To MISS BEEHCROFT.*) Where'd I got to?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Blessed if I remember! You wander to that extent that my brain is giving out.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Ah, yes! The missus's noo gown!

MISS BEEHCROFT. What was wrong with it?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. What was *right* with it? Great Scot——! (*Checking himself and changing his tone.*) Mark you, I am not disloyal to her. A splendid

woman; pious and domesticated, and all that! A splendid woman! (*Again rocking himself to and fro.*) Oh, but the depressin' figure she cut last night——!

MISS BEEHCROFT. Dowdy?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Showed a bit o' neck no bigger than the back of your hand! In these days! In these days!

MISS BEEHCROFT (*whose display of throat is on a more liberal scale—sharing his disgust*). Ridiculous!

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Other men mayn't be as sensitive on the point as I am; but I'm a dressy man—I confess it—I'm a dressy man, and to be constantly in the society of a dowdy female is agony to me—agony. (*Clenching his fists.*) The sight of my missus occasionally——!

MISS BEEHCROFT. What's she like in the day-time?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Don't ask me. Don't ask me.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*in a huff*). Cert'nly not, if it's a secret.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Worse; worse than at night. Skirts down to the top of her boots!

MISS BEEHCROFT. Oh, my gracious!

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. In these days!

MISS BEEHCROFT (*glancing at her own ankles with approval and tittering*). He, he, he! Perhaps she belongs to the thick-ankle brigade?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*pensively, as if looking across a wide space of years*). She usen't to; she usen't to.

MISS BEEHCROFT. Wears grey woollens next to her skin, shouldn't be surprised?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Probably; probably. (*With a wave of the hand.*) We're not on those terms.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*softening towards him*). Oh, well, I'm awfully grieved for you; truly I am.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*laying his hand on hers*). Thank you; thank you.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*removing her hand and slapping him gently*). Now, then! Conduct yourself.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*rising and deliberately shifting his chair still closer to hers, so that the seats grate*). It's

terrible; it's terrible. (*Sitting again, their elbows touching.*) She makes me feel so old; so shockin'ly old.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Wouldn't strike me you're old; though you're no infant, are you?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*almost whimpering*). Anyhow, I'm wonderfully well preserved. And it's devilish hard on me that I should be doomed to such an existence; devilish hard.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*languidly*). Cheerio. We all have our troubles, one sort or another.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*edging away from her and raising his finger as before*). Mark you, I'm no traitor to the missus. I appreciate her fine qualities too much for that. I'm no traitor to the missus.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*virtuously*). 'Course not. Shouldn't permit this liberty if I thought there was anything behind it.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*resuming his former position*). Now, you—you have the opposite effect on me. You make me feel a lad. A mere lad!

MISS BEECHCROFT (*gratified*). Glad, I'm shaw.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*sighing*). Ah, if I had anybody like you at home—if *you* were my property——!

MISS BEECHCROFT. Yes, but I'm not, saucy.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*sentimentally*). If, when I set out for the City in the morning, I could carry with me a mental vision of *you* in a pale pink peignoir biddin' me good-bye on the landing; and when I returned, worn and weary——!

(*He finds the CHAIR MAN, who has re-entered from the right, again standing before him.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*to the man*). Paid.

MISS BEECHCROFT (*to the man*). Paid.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Paid.

MISS BEECHCROFT. We have our tickets.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. We have the damned things. (*Continuing his talk to MISS BEECHCROFT.*) If, when I returned from the City, worn and weary—— (*To the*

man, who hasn't stirred.) Oh! (*Searching in his pockets angrily for the tickets.*) This is a filthy Park; a perfectly filthy Park! (*Trying one pocket after another without success.*) Where are they? One comes here for a little rest and recreation—where are they?—a little rest and recreation——! (*She dips her fingers into the upper pocket of his waistcoat on the side nearest to her. He squirms.*) He, he! Don't! You tickle me. (*She pulls out the tickets and gives them to him.*) Thank you. (*He shows the tickets to the man, who, having saluted him again, shuffles away on the left. Taking off his hat, POSTLETHWAITE proceeds to fix the tickets in the front part of the hat-band.*) This is the only Park in Europe where a lady and gentleman can't sit and chat in peace and comfort. It's atrocious; scandalous! (*He surveys the tickets in his hat-band with satisfaction and then inadvertently puts his hat on hind-side before.*) Where'd we got to?

MISS BEECHCROFT. Blessed if I remember! That man's reducing me to a state of pulp.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Ah, yes! I was goin' to say that if, when I returned from the City worn and weary, I could hear your voice callin' out to me, and see you trippin' joyfully down the stairs, and find myself being kissed and hugged in the hall——!

MISS BEECHCROFT (*wriggling*). Oh, you don't want much, do you!

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*glancing round about him*). Hullo——!

MISS BEECHCROFT. Eh?

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MR. POSTLETHWAITE. People beginnin' to move. (*Looking at his watch.*) I'd no idea it was so late. Must be off soon.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Live near heah?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Not far. (*He slips his arm through hers. She doesn't resist.*) Two or three minutes more. (*Pressing her arm.*) This little cackle with you has bucked me up amazin'ly.

MISS BEECHCROFT. Been nice, hasn't it?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Sad to think we're never to meet again; but that's life. When we part, you'll go

your way and I mine ; and all that'll be left will be a memory.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*also in sentimental vein*). Yes—what's the saying ?—sheep that pass in the night !

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*delicately*). Ships—ships that pass in the night.

MISS BEEHCROFT. Ships, is it ?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. I believe so.

MISS BEEHCROFT. 'Xpect you're right. Sheep lie down at night-time, don't they ?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. I believe so.

MISS BEEHCROFT. Do you know, somehow, I've taken quite a fancy to you, in spite of your boldness ? Is there any reason why we *shouldn't* meet again, just for a stroll and a sit ?

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*reflectively*). N-no, I—I suppose not. Rather dangerous, though—risky !

MISS BEEHCROFT. Oh, you needn't, if you funk it. No harm's done when none is intended is *my* motto.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. I—I agree. I agree.

MISS BEEHCROFT. Kensington Gardens is quieter than this. Might be in the country. There's a seat by the water——

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*withdrawing his arm and holding up his finger again*). Mark you, I'm faithful to the missus ; faithful to the missus in thought and deed. There isn't a husband in the whole of London——

(*He is interrupted by seeing the CHAIR MAN, who has entered from the left at the back, standing before them once more. He points to his hat and pursues his theme.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*to MISS BEEHCROFT*). There isn't a husband in the whole of London—(*pointing to his hat*)—there isn't a husband in the whole of London—(*pointing to his hat with increasing impatience*)—who is more attentive—(*pointing to his hat*)—more considerate—(*pointing to his hat*)—more—(*breaking off and storming at the man furiously*). Confound it, haven't you eyes in your head ! (*Taking his hat off.*) If you can't remem-

her faces, surely—! (*Discovering what has happened.*) Oh——! (*Apologetically.*) My fault.

MISS BEEHCROFT (*snatching at the tickets and putting them into her bag.*) Give them to me, do!

(*The man touches the peak of his cap again and finally departs at the back on the right.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Oh, what a loathsome Park! (*Putting on his hat.*) What a detestable Park! (*To MISS BEEHCROFT.*) Where'd we got to?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Kensington Gardens.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*dubiously*). Ah—h'm——

MISS BEEHCROFT. We might pick each other up by the statue—the statue of the young man on a horse——

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. D-delightful; delightful. (*Looking at his watch again.*) You—er—you haven't told me yet anything about yourself. I've confided in you.

MISS BEEHCROFT. No objection, I'm shaw. Orphan. Only living relative an aunt at Kilburn.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*commiserating*). Dear me! And—er—your—your occupation? I presume you——

MISS BEEHCROFT. Guess. I'm not ashamed of it by any manner of means, though I *am* low down in the social scale.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Er—typist?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Wrong.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. In a—shop—(*correcting himself*) —a store?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Wrong again. I'm in service.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*dashed*). Domestic—service ——?

MISS BEEHCROFT (*with a nod*). Parlourmaid. (*Proudly.*) First-class.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. No doubt, no doubt. (*Examining the knob of his stick.*) And—er—this is your evening out?

MISS BEEHCROFT. No; I'm not in a place at present. Last people were dirt.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Indeed?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Going into a new place on Monday. (*Motioning with her head.*) Inverclyde Terrace.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*becoming curiously interested*). Inverclyde Terrace?

MISS BEEHCROFT. Off the Bayswater Road.

(*He slowly gets out of his chair. Somewhat startled by his expression, she also rises.*)

MR. POSTLETHWAITE (*staring at her*). Not—not Number Seven, by any chance?

MISS BEEHCROFT (*facing him with wide-open eyes*). Yes.

MR. POSTLETHWAITE. Oh! (*Turning from her*). Oh, my God——!

(*Lifting his feet painfully, he leaves her and disappears on the right. She stands rooted, gazing at his retreating figure.*)

THE END.

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